

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &  
Professional Papers

Graduate School

---

2017

### Median

Amy Petit  
*University of Montana*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>



Part of the [Sculpture Commons](#)

## Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Petit, Amy, "Median" (2017). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 10925.  
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/10925>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

MEDIAN

By

AMY BETH KENDALL PETIT

Bachelor of Fine Arts, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID, 1998

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

May 2017

Approved by:

Scott Whittenburg, Dean of The Graduate School  
Graduate School

Professor Cathryn Mallory, Chair  
Fine Art

Director of the School of Art, Associate Professor Brad Allen  
Fine Art

Professor Valerie Hedquist  
Art History and Criticism

Director of Creative Writing, Professor Debra Earling  
Creative Writing

*Median*

Chairperson: Professor Cathryn Mallory

*Median* reflects my observation of changing forms of communication in the digital age and how that affects personal interaction, expression, and the value that we assign to objects. The sculptural objects in this exhibit stem from my formative experiences of frequent relocation, as well as a professional background in the fast-paced technological world. These factors, combined with contemplative and repetitive sculptural practices, help illustrate the anxiety and discomfort that can accompany rapid advances in communication practices. My research situates my work within contemporary art by drawing on the relevance of indexical signs, reliquaries, current discussions of communication in the digital age, and connections with contemporary artists such as Doris Salcedo, Rachel Whiteread, Allan McCollum, and Lygia Clark. *Median* explores the memories we carry, the traces we leave, and the role that the object plays in this dynamic.

## Table of Contents

1. Abstract .....	ii
2. Image List .....	iv
3. Introduction .....	1
4. Background (Analog) .....	1
5. Background (Digital) .....	2
6. Exhibition .....	3
• <i>I Think I Lost You There</i> .....	4
• <i>Too Long Didn't Read</i> .....	7
• <i>Prosthetic Series</i> .....	9-14
• <i>Worth Saving</i> .....	14
• <i>Look at You</i> .....	17
• <i>Passage</i> .....	17
7. Conclusion .....	19
8. Bibliography .....	20



## Image List

<i>Number and Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
Fig. 1 <i>I Think I Lost You There</i> , 2017 .....	5
Fig. 2 <i>I Think I Lost You There</i> (detail) .....	5
Fig. 3 <i>Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates</i> , Allan McCollum, 1982-84.....	6
Fig. 4 <i>Repetition Nineteen III</i> , Eva Hesse, 1968 .....	6
Fig. 5 <i>Too Long Didn't Read</i> , 2017 .....	8
Fig. 6 <i>Too Long Didn't Read</i> (detail) .....	8
Fig. 7 <i>Atrabiliarios</i> , Doris Salcedo, 1996.....	8
Fig. 8 <i>Drawing Prosthetic: Index Finger</i> , 2017 .....	9
Fig. 9 <i>Drawing Prosthetic: All of your Digits</i> , 2017 .....	9
Fig. 10 <i>Untitled</i> , Cy Twombly, 1970 .....	10
Fig. 11 <i>Exhibition Drawing</i> , Anonymous, 2017.....	10
Fig. 12 <i>Handwriting Prosthetics</i> , 2017 .....	11
Fig. 13 <i>Handwriting Prosthetics</i> (detail).....	11
Fig. 14 <i>Facetime</i> , 2017 .....	13
Fig. 15 <i>Facetime</i> (in use) .....	13
Fig. 16 <i>Diálogo Óculos (Dialogue Goggles)</i> , Lygia Clark, 1968 .....	14
Fig. 17 <i>Worth Saving</i> , 2017 .....	15
Fig. 18 <i>Worth Saving</i> (detail) .....	15
Fig. 19 <i>Arm Reliquary</i> , 1230 .....	16
Fig. 20 <i>Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial</i> , Rachel Whiteread, 2000 .....	16
Fig. 21 <i>Look at You</i> , 2017 .....	17
Fig. 22 <i>Passage</i> , 2017 .....	18
Fig. 23 <i>Passage</i> (detail) .....	18
Fig. 24 <i>States of Mind I: The Farewells</i> , Umberto Boccioni, 1911.....	19
Fig. 25 <i>States of Mind II: Those Who Go</i> , Umberto Boccioni, 1911 .....	19
Fig. 26 <i>States of Mind III: Those Who Stay</i> , Umberto Boccioni, 1911 .....	19

“Still, helplessly, we touch. We are beasts like any other, and despite all our powers of imagination and conceptualization and intellectualization and cerebration and visualization, we physical creatures experience the world only via our five senses.”

— Paco Underhill quoted by David Sax  
*The Revenge of the Analog*, 2016

“Life is change, Charlotte.  
Death is dwelling on the past or staying in one place too long.”

— Cher as Mrs. Flax,  
Film: *Mermaids*, 1990

## **Introduction**

Something is always lost in the move.

I carefully unwrap the contents of the box containing objects from my childhood, removing the tape from the unidentifiable shapes, feeling carefully if something seems loose or rattling. It's a process I've repeated many times as I relocate from place to place out of an ingrained sense of wanderlust. Packing my possessions, labeling boxes, thinking ahead to what I will need first. Most of these objects (particularly ones that seem non-essential at the moment) remain dormant in a storage unit and in my memory until they are rediscovered. Some things reemerge broken and some never get unpacked.

I frequently observe and respond to what is present and absent whether it be an object, person, or action. My artistic practice is focused on my examinations of how people interact and noticeable disconnects in communication. Human interaction mediated by a screen or device permeates current society. Face-to-face conversations give way to abbreviated text or email messages as a means of seemingly efficient communication; however, we sometimes equate efficient interaction to emotional proximity, and the nuances of personal interaction are lost.

I will discuss my work according to its chronological production. I will also highlight themes of presence and absence, and point out instances of mediation, denial of clarity, and ways to honor loss. By presenting correlations to other artists, particularly those whose work relates to semiotics and the indexical mark, I situate myself within the contemporary art field.

## **Background (Analog)**

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and my family loved exploration. My family built and remodeled houses for a living and, as a result, we moved frequently. My upbringing and adult life have been an amalgam of transition and reflection across many homes and locations.

I have lived in over 40 places and the persistent upheaval of packing and unpacking, unfamiliarity and adjustment has had a profound impact on my memory and artistic practice. The excitement of exploration for me is equal to the stimulation of making. I crave reinvention, and objects become a touchstone to memory. They can be a tangible, tactile reminder of a place lost to the distance of time. Sometimes I resent my accumulation of possessions as unwanted physical and emotional baggage. Then it's time to reevaluate, repurpose, and discard because—inevitably—the desire for new experiences surface.

### **Background (Digital)**

My former professional background as a graphic designer instilled a tendency to notice how people communicate. In 1998, after earning my BFA in studio art, I spent 17 years working in the design field. During that time, rapid advances in desktop publishing and the rise of the World Wide Web profoundly changed the way people communicate. I had many clients in the technology sector (an industry that is constantly reinventing itself), and the newest version of software or a device was repeatedly touted as the thing that will make one's life easier or better. I questioned the value of “the next best thing” and wondered what was wrong with the old thing. Was technology taking into account what makes us human? The pace of accumulating skills to retain relevance in the field was overwhelming, but necessary to avoid becoming obsolete. By returning to school, I removed myself from a very fast-paced, communication-oriented, and tech-savvy professional world to slow down and re-experience tactility and making from a very analog place. In hindsight, I was searching for what was missing.

Professor of Social Studies of Sciences and Technology at MIT, Sherry Turkle, has dedicated her research to human interaction with technology. In her book, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, she asks an important question. “What road are we traveling? Technology presents itself as a one-way street; we are likely to

dismiss discontents about its direction because we read them as growing out of nostalgia or a Luddite impulse or simply in vain. But when we ask what we “miss”, we may discover what we care about, what we believe to be worth protecting. We prepare ourselves not necessarily to reject technology but to shape it in ways that honor what we hold dear.”<sup>1</sup> In my studio practice, I strive to highlight an absence or honor a presence, and help figure out what is worth saving.

## **Exhibition**

My exhibition, *Median* was installed at the Gallery of Visual Arts at the University of Montana from March 30–April 13, 2017. The title literally means that in an observed set of quantities or values it falls at the midpoint of distribution and there is an equal probability of falling above or below it.<sup>2</sup> It is the middle. As a conscious being, it is the place where you make the choice to move forward, backward, or stay still. The title is applicable because the objects in this exhibition are asking the viewer to consider their relationship to the work and to each other. I’ve categorized *Median* (though not in a linear arrangement) into vignettes. This provides the opportunity for the viewer to experience each piece individually, and presumably consider their relationship to the exhibit as a whole.

Mediate is a closely related word to median. Mediation plays a role in how the viewer experiences the objects, primarily by the extent to which communication has been mediated for them by devices. For the purposes of my thesis, I am considering devices to include computers, smart phones, as well as any application that facilitates interaction such as Facebook, Twitter, Facetime, etc. I don’t consider the extent to which people use technology a strictly generational divide because people adapt to it at different rates. I am also defining digital and analog by utilizing David Sax’s explanation in *Revenge of the Analog*: “If something is connected to the Internet, runs with the help of software, or is accessed by a computer, it is digital. Analog,

---

1. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. (Basic Books, 2011), 19

2. “Median,” Oxford Dictionary, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/median>.

on the other hand “...doesn’t require a computer to function, and most often analog exists in the physical world (as opposed to the virtual one).”<sup>3</sup>

I’m also discussing absence and presence in my work through the ideas of semiotics, which is an investigation of how meaning is created and communicated. Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and US philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce were key in defining structural linguistics and how they are applied to art. This was the foundation for Structuralism. Saussure identified binary structural elements such as a signifier (an object) and the signified (how it is represented). Peirce further expanded the signified into the icon, the index, and the symbol.<sup>4</sup> For example, consider a cat. The icon is a pictorial representation, such as an emoji, to represent a cat. The index is a physical trace, and is the closest, most intimate thing that would indicate a cat. A good example of this would be a cat’s footprints because they are the actual impression the cat made. The symbol would be the letters C-A-T, which are arbitrary letters that we have designated to represent the idea of a cat. I will focus on indexical signs, point out where I feel they occur in my work, and discuss the effect they may have on the viewer.

### **I Think I Lost You There**

My concept for *I Think I Lost You There* was to illustrate the physical and emotional weight of an absence or personal loss.

Handwritten text on lined paper: "The call was dropped. We were cut off before we finished the story. That was the place I lost you."

The work consisted of a discarded pile of cast iron picture frames on a fragment of wooden flooring, and suggested a tie to a domestic space. A few of the boards were subtly bending and a few snapped under the physical weight of the objects. Some of frames were rusting and partially filled with iron which suggested the passage of time and were reminiscent of a lost presence. Typically, we use the idea of framing as a means to focus attention. In this piece, it’s a method

---

3. David Sax, *The Revenge of the Analog*. (PublicAffairs, 2016), xiv

4. Laurie Schneider Adams, “Semiotics I: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism” in *The Methodologies of Art* (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 1996), 133-159.



(left, Fig. 1) *I Think I Lost You There*, cast iron, wood, 2017  
(right, Fig. 2) *I Think I Lost You There* (detail)

of highlighting an absence. The individual frames near the top of the pile appeared to be wrenched and twisted. During the process of grieving a loss, an attempt to regain control is a normal part of coping. I see the distortion of the frames as an attempt of taking control of loss.

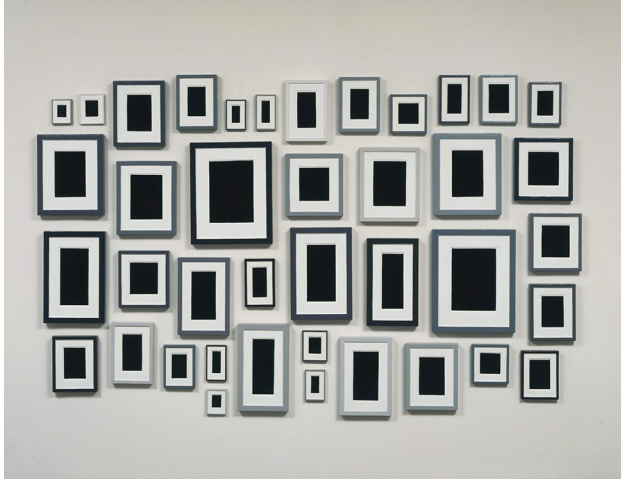
I chose cast iron as a material that is not only physically heavy, but indicative of progress. Cast iron has been used as a material as early as the 6th century BC and grew to be an important, yet brittle, structural material. During the Industrial Revolution, in the 18th and 19th centuries, development of the Bessemer processes for further refining iron would produce a stronger and eventually more commonly used alloy – steel.<sup>5</sup> The parallel to this piece and advances in technology is not just in the material choice. It is represented in the literal and metaphorical use of the frame for loss. The idea of family photos on the wall are discontinued in favor of a digital photo stream devoid of tactility and a consistent presence. Time passes and loss accumulates.

Artist Allan McCullum also utilizes frames in his piece, *Surrogates*. In a series of cast frames, he meticulously hand paints them in order to create a commentary between the labor of individualism and mass production.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, *I Think I Lost You There*, preserved the industrial process of casting but differentiated by retaining some physical individuality of the

5. “Cast Iron” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/cast-iron>.

6. “Allan McCullum.” MOMA, accessed May 4, 2017. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79653?locale=en>.





(left, Fig. 3) *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*, enamel on cast hydrostone, 1982-84 (photo: MoMA)

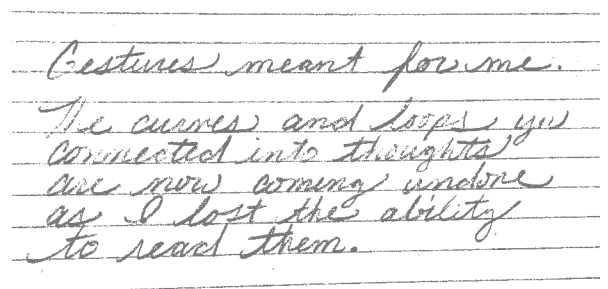


(right, Fig. 4) *Repetition Nineteen III*, fiberglass and polyester resin, 1968 (photo: MoMA)

objects. The frames themselves have a history and retain marks and traces of previous use. The retention of these flaws, along with the absence of an image, represent the lineage of the object and function by letting the viewer know that something happened here.

In situating myself within the contemporary art field, there are some facets of my work that align closely with Post-Minimalism. Namely, the use of multiple objects and expressive potential of materials. I am using multiples as a tool to emphasize accumulation but suggesting a narrative through a cracking floor, the manipulation of the frame and absence of an image. Artist Eva Hesse's work *Repetition Nineteen III*, is a good example of the use of repetition and material manipulation though, unlike my work, is not overtly trying to suggest a narrative.

One facet of present day communication that I am interested in is the impulse to type rather than write. This led me to an investigation of the act of handwriting. The first writing system, Cuneiform, was invented over five thousand years ago.<sup>7</sup>



7. Anne Trubek, *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting*. (Bloomsberry, 2016), 1



With the advent of personal computers and smart phones, we now type and swipe to convey information. Handwritten letters are different from emails. Typing is standardized and fonts are not unique to the author like the characteristics of handwriting. The screen mediates our messages and the physical object of a letter is no longer retained. There is an indexical mark—a direct connection—left when the pen or pencil I use to write touches the paper. My fingerprints are sometimes retained and are traces that I had once been there communicating to you.

It was this idea of something “having been there” that French Literary and cultural critic, Roland Barthes identified as being the potency in the indexical mark. In locating a photograph of his mother after her death he realized that, although she was gone, a trace of her remained in that image. It was the light from her presence reflected back to the camera that made that imprint on the photograph. Although Barthes began his work by expanding the definitions of Structuralism, it was his efforts to restore humanism that eventually let him to develop Post-Structuralist ideas.<sup>8</sup> This concept of restoring human sensory experience and connection are important in the next pieces.

### **Too Long Didn't Read**

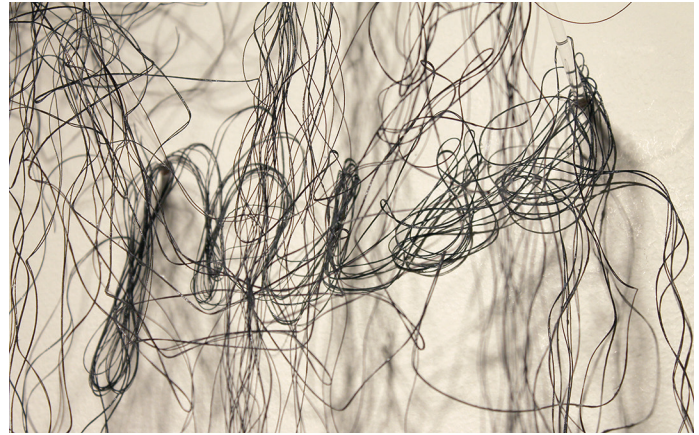
On the wall hung a mass of dark threads cascading from acrylic rods. At first glance it could be seen as just a tangled object. On further inspection, letters might have become recognizable and then perhaps a remnant of a word might be decoded. It's the partial beginning to a letter written in cursive that untangled into threads just hovering above the floor. In conveying the loss of a mode of communication, I'm using the connotations of thread, not as a means to repair but as an element that was once intact but now unraveling.

---

8. Adams, *The Methodologies of Art*. 154-159

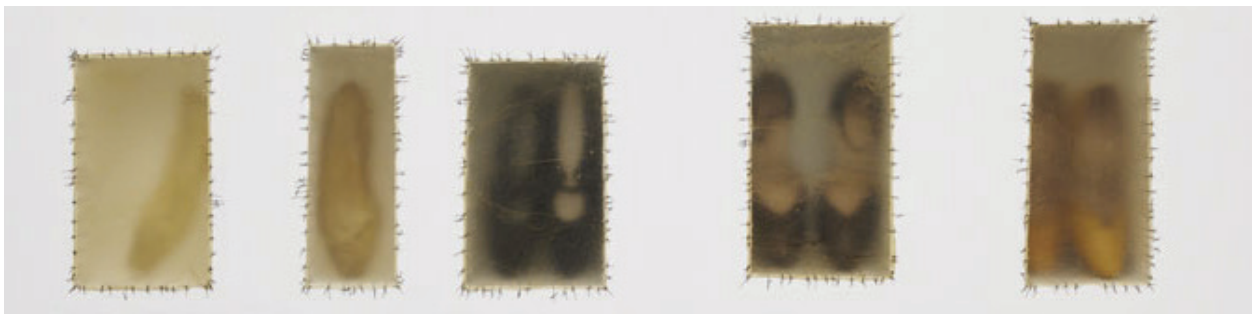


(left, Fig. 5) *Too Long Didn't Read*, thread 2017  
 (right, Fig. 6) *Too Long Didn't Read* (detail)



Some of my early experiments with using thread led me to the work of sculptor, Doris Salcedo. I am influenced by her use of material to suggest presence and absence. Her subject matter is cultural and personal loss as a result of the violence in her native Columbia. By encasing personal, often domestic, objects she simultaneously highlights and honors loss. Specifically, the shoes in her piece

*Atrabiliarios* acutely highlights what is missing—the people that wore them. Worn shoes are stitched into the wall behind translucent material alluding to a reliquary. She uses thread to stitch as a means of attempting repair and honoring those lost.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Salcedo's work, I am illustrating loss through disintegration with no attempt at repair.



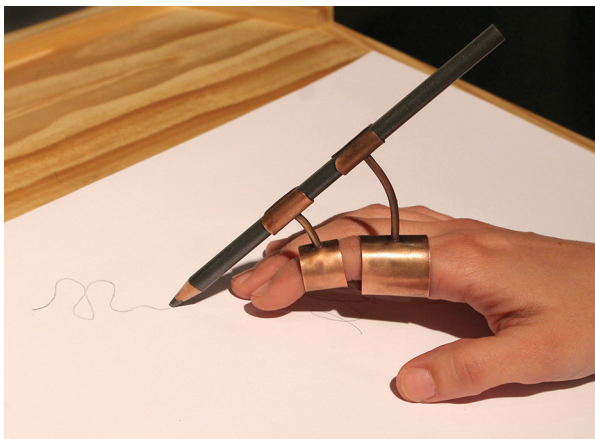
(Fig. 7) *Atrabiliarios*, shoes, drywall, paint, wood, animal fiber, and surgical thread, 1996 (photo: Saatchi Gallery)

9. Julie Rodrigues Widholm and Madeline Grynstejn., *Doris Salcedo*. (Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015)

## Prosthetic Series

The gestures of writing are what inspired the Prosthetic Series: *Drawing Prosthetics: All of your digits*, *Drawing Prosthetic: Index finger*, *Handwriting Prosthetics* and *Facetime*. Conceptually, they were all devices intended to augment the body for different types of communication: drawing, handwriting, and looking at one another. They were also instruments that highlighted personal and tactile interaction. The level of craft was carefully considered in the prosthetic series because of the intimate nature of the objects. In all of my pieces, craftsmanship plays an important role. My family has strong tradition of making and I grew up watching the careful efforts of woodworkers and lapidary artists highly refine objects. I find that by spending time on the refinement of a material, I allow myself a meditative and restorative process that is often sacrificed in the chaos of daily life.

*It only takes the smallest  
more a correction.  
The slightest adjustment  
for you to remember.  
Now you have come back.*



(left, Fig. 8) *Drawing Prosthetic: Index Finger*, copper, pencil, 2017  
(right, Fig. 9) *Drawing Prosthetic: All of your Digits*, copper, pencils, 2017

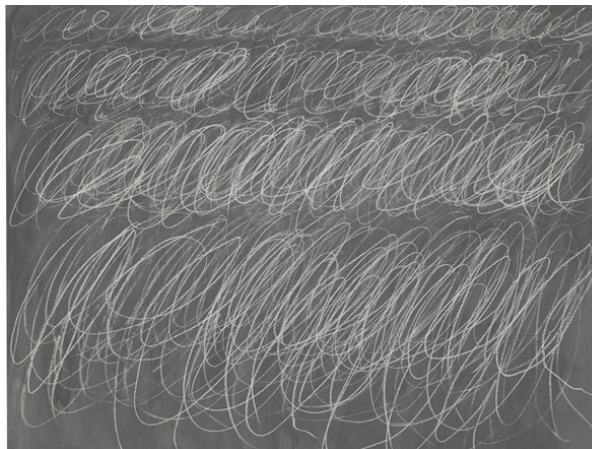
Situated in the middle of the room were the small copper drawing devices that viewers could interact with. The choice of presentation throughout the exhibit was particularly important to the content of the work. Joan Gibbon, author of *Contemporary Art and Memory* points out, “Each form of viewing makes different demands on the viewer and evokes slightly different



cultural practices which inevitably give a different ‘frame’ or register to the works.”<sup>10</sup>

The prosthetics were meant to feel approachable, so they were positioned on what appeared to be writing desks. They may have also stirred associations of learning to write or draw depending on a viewer’s individual formative experience. Wall text further invited viewer participation. In contrast, pieces such as *I Think I Lost You There*, highlighted distance through the barriers of wooden floor fragments.

Both *Drawing Prosthetic: All Of Your Digits* and *Drawing Prosthetic: Index Finger* were fingertip coverings that had pencils attached. Instead of pressing keys or tapping on a smart phone, both of these devices prevented the wearer from doing anything but making a physical mark on a piece of paper. Viewers were invited to create a drawing to take with them but surprisingly a number of them were left. I was struck by the viewer’s desire to leave a mark—an indication of presence which was often gestural.



(left, Fig. 10) *Untitled*, paint, wax crayon, 1970 (photo: Saatchi Gallery)



(left, Fig. 11) *Anonymous*, graphite, paper, 2017

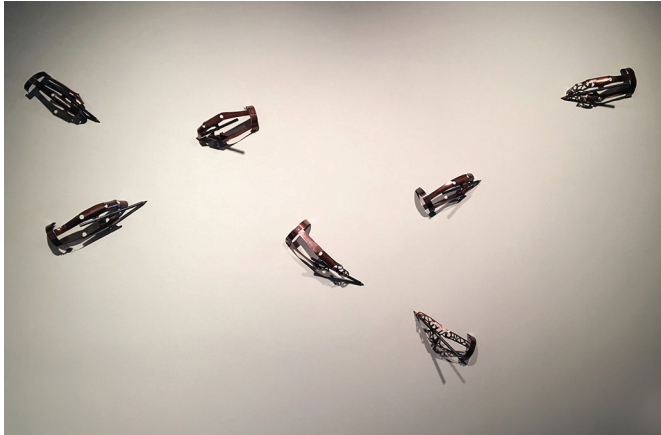
Painter Cy Twombly was also interested in the act of mark-making. In Roland Barthes essay on Twombly, he indicated that the viewer was not asked “to savor the product, but to review, to identify, and so to speak, “enjoy the movement that has ended up here.” What prevails is “it’s play, it’s whims, it’s explorations.”<sup>11</sup> I’m not drawing a direct correlation to Twombly’s work or lineage

---

10. Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*. (I.B. Tauris, 2007), 43

11. Roland Barthes, “Cy Twombly: Works on Paper”, Richard Howard (trans.) in *The Responsibilities of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*. (Berkeley: California University Press, 1985.)

but rather to the impulse of the gesture to that is retained in mark making. There is an enjoyable facet to leaving a physical mark that is absent in a virtual one. Perhaps it's the desire to not be forgotten by leaving a personal trace — an immortal “I was here”.



(left, Fig. 12) *Handwriting Prosthetics*, copper, pencils, 2017  
(right, Fig. 13) *Handwriting Prosthetic* (detail)

## Handwriting Prosthetics

I arranged *Handwriting Prosthetics* on the wall to appear as if they were in conversation. Initially they looked like archaic devices reminiscent of hands holding a pencil. They were designed to seem corrective with the intention of augmenting a viewers' hand into a writing position. Although this arrangement of the prosthetics was not meant for viewer interaction, there was one prosthetic attached to a guestbook at the exhibit that was meant for use.

There is a current cultural debate on the merits of continuing to teach cursive writing in schools. Anne Trubeck, author of *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting*, writes “Our concerns over handwriting tell us as much about us as they do about technology. We are all....living through a transitional moment. Although we may disagree on the merits and demerits of cursive instruction, few would argue that we are writing less than we were a generation ago.”<sup>12</sup>

---

12. Trubeck, *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting*. 152

By creating a device that (depending on your point of view) forces or guides the hand, I am asking the viewer to contemplate their personal response to the act of handwriting and whether it is archaic or worth retaining.

All of the devices in the Prosthetics series were created from copper, one of the first metals used from about 8000 BC . It's highly conductive for both heat and electricity and vital in humans as a trace mineral.<sup>13</sup> It's often used in small-scale metal fabrication as a pattern before an object is replicated in a more precious material such as silver or gold.

The material choice of copper was also conceptual in that I am purposefully referencing devices that appear anachronistic. They suggest belonging closer to the Industrial Revolution than present day. Conceptually, I chose the Industrial Revolution as a time of considerable transition and innovation in order to parallel changes we are experiencing now during the Digital Age. The aesthetics of the Prosthetic series, particularly the rivets and forged mechanisms, share some associations with a cultural trend called "Steampunk". Although there are many conflicting definitions of what officially constitutes Steampunk, in general it is a literary sub-genre of science fiction and fantasy that utilizes an elaborate look of technology from the 1800s.<sup>14</sup> I believe the product of Steampunk is primarily one of fantasy and entertainment. In the Prosthetic series, I am more interested in providing a means for contemplation and connection. I am also using a paired-down aesthetic whereby the mechanisms are all functional, not just decorative. Therefore, through content and form, my work has a different objective.

It's important to mention the Luddites, particularly in reference to the Industrial Revolution. The Luddites were an organized group of 19th Century English workers who were worried about their jobs being replaced by mechanized technology. In truth, they were fine with machines. As Richard Conniff of Smithsonian Magazine writes, "They just wanted machines that made

---

13. "Copper" Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/science/copper>.

14. "What is Steampunk." Steampunk.com, accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.steampunk.com/what-is-steampunk/>.

high-quality goods.”<sup>15</sup> I make this distinction because it would be easy to consider my work anti-technology and that is not the intention. My relationship with technology is complex. I am fascinated by new processes and devices yet can’t help wondering what humanistic elements we are losing in the process. A statement echoed by Conniff when he states “...their protest is more clearly a reminder that it’s possible to live well with technology—but only if we continually question the way it shapes our lives.”<sup>16</sup>



(left, Fig. 14) *Facetime*, copper, 2017  
(right, Fig. 15) *Facetime* (in use)

## Facetime

Located near *Handwriting Prosthetics* were a couple of devices meant to accommodate two people each called, *Facetime*. They situated the participants facing each other and looking directly ahead by way of an adjustable chin rest. Depending on where a person was standing, there could have been an awareness of the proximity to the participant not only in front but behind you. The device directed the viewer’s gaze forward and concentrated on what is in front of it. The interpersonal distance was close but not intended to be overtly intimate. The angle that we hold our heads at when looking at devices or screens can put anywhere from 10 to 60lbs of pressure on the back of our neck.<sup>17</sup> The Facetime devices both corrected that posture and created an opportunity for focused human interaction. Something that appears increasingly absent when

15. Richard Conniff, “What the Luddites Really Fought Against” *Smithsonian Magazine*, March 2011. Accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-the-luddites-really-fought-against-264412/>  
16. Ibid.

17. Meredith Engel, “Texting can put more than 50 pounds of pressure on your spine: study”, *New York Daily News*, Nov. 17, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/health/texting-puts-pounds-pressure-spine-study-article-1.2013885>



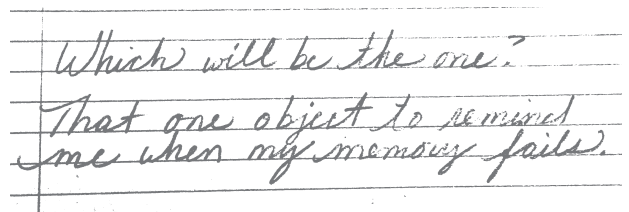


(Fig. 16) *Diálogo Óculos (Dialogue Goggles)* (photo: Art21 Magazine)  
glass, metal, rubber 1968

we turn to screens to mediate  
our conversations.

In creating Facetime, I was  
inspired by Brazilian artist Lygia  
Clark's 1968 piece *Diálogo Óculos*  
(*Dialogue Goggles*). Clark was part  
of the Neo-Concrete movement which  
was a group that sought to further

merge art and life by infusing it with more poetic feeling and sensuality. Clark was striving to  
create participatory work in order to support these efforts.<sup>18</sup> This was at a time when the defini-  
tion of what constituted a work of art was also being challenged by similar movements such as  
Pop, Fluxus and Performance. My work also seeks participation, but in today's cultural context of  
digital mediation, I am resorting to an analog means of connection by using physical proximity.



### **Worth Saving**

Worth Saving consisted of a table with a metallic surface that had a few small boxes and  
packed objects. The boxes themselves were bronze and filled with bubble wrap and packing  
peanuts made of glass. Within the boxes, the glow of an unseen object emanated and the light  
appeared to change. Glass packages and peanuts were strewn over the table suggesting that  
the act of packing was in progress, although, it is unclear whether the items are being wrapped  
or unwrapped.

18. "Neo-Concrete" Tate, accessed May 4, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/neo-concrete>.





(left, Fig. 17) *Worth Saving*, bronze, glass, zinc, wood, digital devices, 2017

(right, Fig. 18) *Worth Saving* (detail)

My concept for *Worth Saving* was to invert the idea of value in relation to objects we choose to save. In this instance, the material surrounding them is treated as more valuable than what it contains. I cast cardboard boxes in bronze which is a material utilized for its durable, castable and corrosive resistant properties.<sup>19</sup> Bronze has not only been widely used for tools, weapons and marine applications but also used for monuments and sculptures—objects considered precious and worth preserving. Delicate cast glass replaced plastic and Styrofoam as packing material. There were hidden digital devices underneath the glass that played arbitrary photos in a rolling stream. This is a commentary on the indiscriminate way in which digital photography has allowed us to amass images.

The boxes functioned like a reliquary. Reliquaries are the containers Christians used to hold the fragments of saints, which were spiritually significant but sometimes physically unremarkable. The containers were often opulent, created of gold or silver and adorned with precious gems. They were considered as important as the fragments they contained because it was the combination of the relic and reliquary that was the link between man and God.<sup>20</sup>

The boxes function as a reliquary in a secular way. They take an ordinary material such

19. "Bronze" Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/bronze-alloy>.

20. Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012. 8-9



(Fig. 19) Arm Reliquary,  
Silver, gilded silver, niello, and gems;  
wood core, 1230 (photo: Met Museum)

as cardboard and through a change in materiality, transform it into a precious object. It is the combination of a precious material and arbitrary images that allude to the reliquary. The boxes, packing peanuts and bubble wrap also reference an indexical mark through the process of casting. The glass is formed from the direct impressions left by the packing material in the molds. Also present in the casts, very much like the picture frames, are traces of the object's past history. The boxes were battered and crumpled showing signs of previous wear. Absence, in many forms, is highlighted through presence of the remaining objects.

I have long been inspired by the work of sculptor Rachel Whiteread. She primarily casts the negative space surrounding the object or space. This allows for the retention of the history of the object but also furthers idea of something "having been there". In Whiteread's case, the original is gone and only the marks on the surface and the negative impression of the object remains. In 2000, she created the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial in Vienna, Austria.



(Fig. 20) Judenplatz  
Holocaust Memorial,  
Vienna, Austria,  
concrete, 2000



It is a stark, concrete construction that appears to be a building with no entrance. The surface is covered with dozens of rows of the impressions of books that represent the untold stories of the lives lost in the Holocaust. It is a potent example of the emotional power of presenting absence.

*Are you still there?*

## **Look at You**

A small cast iron frame, titled *Look at You*, sat on the wall just ahead of the video installation. The contents of the frame were obscured by cast cardboard shapes. Small openings both revealed and concealed the light of a digital device. *Look at You* contained an iPad® with a slideshow of



(Fig. 21) *Look at You*,  
cast iron, digital device, 2017

selfies playing, though none were completely clear to the viewer. Only snippets of information were briefly available to be deciphered. This piece is a commentary on the impulse we have when presenting images of ourselves online. The memories of ourselves that we put forth into the world are highly aestheticized and carefully curated. For various reasons, we only want people to see the perfected version of ourselves.

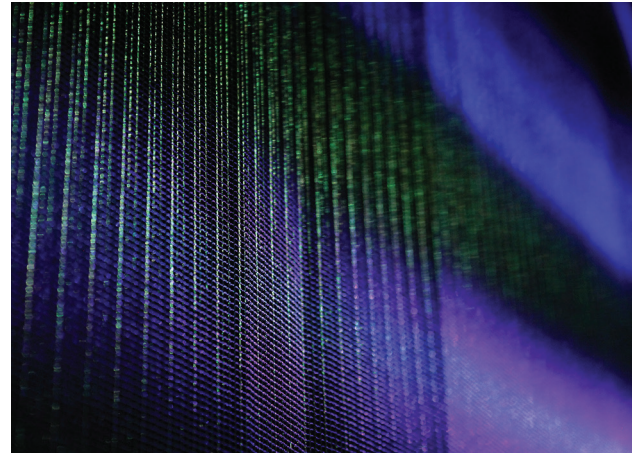
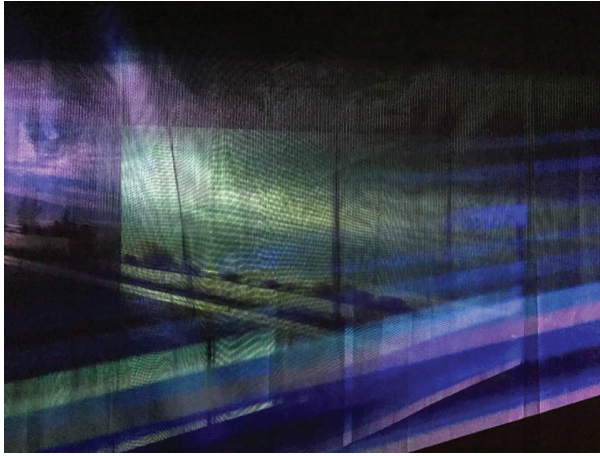
Much like the bronze boxes in *Worth Saving*, I am denying the viewer clarity. This decision functions by creating a situation in which the viewer is not able to fully grasp the picture therefore negating the ideal image.

*Disoriented by perpetual  
motion and course corrections,  
I keep driving  
I am at the start of a long  
journey whose conclusion is uncertain*

## **Passage**

The denial of clarity figured even more prominently in my video installation, *Passage*. As the viewer entered the main hallway in the Gallery of Visual Arts, two overlapping videos played with no sound. The videos were situated between two tall 4' x 8' walls and projected at an angle on horizontal and diagonal layers of mosquito netting. The viewer was directed along



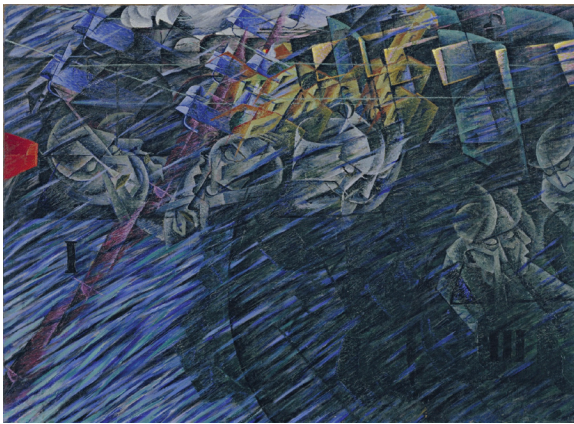


(left, Fig. 22) *Passage*, mosquito netting, projected digital imagery, 2017  
 (right, Fig. 23) *Passage* (detail)

a hallway and stopped to view the piece with their back against the wall. One of the videos was a streaming collection of scenery that fluidly changed from one landscape to the next. Presumably taken from a car window, the viewer saw passing trees, fields, and city streets through a variety of weather conditions and seasons. The other video played directly on top of it and was a collection of streaming digital static. The folds and layers of the mosquito netting bounced the image and acted as a barrier for the viewer to obtain full clarity as to the content of the piece.

My concept for this piece was to lend physicality to the distortion and disorientation we can sometimes feel when we are overwhelmed with digital information and images. With the video, I want to clarify that I am not using a specific genre of film or linear storytelling. My approach with this piece was to use digital imagery and projection as materials and treat it in a malleable way in order to heighten the optical confusion. By not allowing the viewer to have full comprehension, I am again further reinforcing the idea of unattainable information.

I was inspired by the work of Futurist painter, Umberto Boccioni. In particular, his series: *States of Mind I, II & III*, in which he sought to express dynamic movement but also upheaval, confusion and sadness. Futurism was an Italian art movement that originated in Italy in 1909. The movement's primary goal was to celebrate technology and the speed of urban life while



*States of Mind Series*, oil on canvas, 1911, (photos: MoMA)  
 (top, Fig. 24) I: *The Farewells*  
 (middle, Fig. 25) II: *Those Who Go*  
 (bottom, Fig. 26) III: *Those Who Stay*

dismantling older forms of culture.<sup>21</sup> I am not making direct correlation to the goals of the Futurist movement, but rather to the sentiment of this particular piece. The *States of Mind* series is overwhelmed with a maze of facets and whirling diagonal lines which further reinforces disorientation. Passage shared similar qualities through the use of diagonal projection and the sense of loss and confusion as images move quickly by without the chance for full comprehension.

## Conclusion

I feel that it is necessary as communication advances to take a step back and reevaluate. In my artistic practice I aim to assess, scrutinize, and creatively mediate interactions through the use of familiar objects. Formally, by paring opposing materials (such as durable bronze and fragile glass) I am able to juxtapose the permanent and impermanent qualities of memory. By employing traces and remnants

within my work, I draw attention to what was once there. It is through this evaluation of loss, I hope to figure out what is important to protect— what is worth saving.

21. "Futurism." The Art Story, accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-futurism.htm>

## Bibliography

Adams, Laurie Schneider. "Semiotics I: Structuralism and Post-Structuralism"  
In *The Methodologies of Art*, 133-159. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1996.

The Art Story. "Futurism" Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-futurism.htm>

Barthes, Roland. "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper" Richard Howard (trans.)  
In *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1985.

Conniff, Richard. "What the Luddites Really Fought Against" Smithsonian Magazine, March 2001.  
Accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/what-the-luddites-really-fought-against-264412/>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Bronze." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<https://www.britannica.com/technology/bronze-alloy>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Cast Iron." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<https://www.britannica.com/technology/cast-iron>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Copper." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<https://www.britannica.com/science/copper>

Engel, Meredith. "Texting can put more than 50 pounds of pressure on your spine: study" New York Daily News, November 17, 2014. Accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/health/texting-puts-pounds-pressure-spine-study-article-1.2013885>.

Gibbons, Joan. *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*. I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Hahn, Cynthia, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

MOMA. "Allan McCollum." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79653?locale=en>

Oxford Dictionary. "Median." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/median>

Rodrigues Widholm, Julie and Madeline Grynsztejn. *Doris Salcedo*. Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Sax, David. *The Revenge of the Analog*. PublicAffairs, 2016.

Steampunk.com. "What is Steampunk." Accessed May 4, 2017.  
<http://www.steampunk.com/what-is-steampunk/>.

Tate. "Neo-Concrete." Accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/n/neo-concrete>

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books, 2011.

Trubek, Anne. *The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting*. Bloomsberry, 2016.